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SUBJECT: ISCI'S HAKIM DISCUSSES ELECTORAL POLITICS AND
FOREIGN INVESTMENT WITH AMBASSADOR

REF: BAGHDAD 02907

Classified By: Ambassador Christopher R. Hill for reason 1.4 (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. During a November 1 meeting, the Chairman of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), Ammar al-Hakim, told the Ambassador that U.S. praise for "secular" parties could be viewed as approval of the Ba'ath Party. Hakim lauded the October 20-21 Business Investment Conference in Washington as a positive symbol of the new U.S.-Iraq relationship. The Ambassador welcomed Hakim's proposed visit to Arab states as a way to change perceptions of Iraq in the region. END SUMMARY.

"Secular Liberals" = Ba'athists?

¶2. (C) Hakim offered the Ambassador his "frank" thoughts on the continuing danger of the Ba'ath Party, which he claimed was using the cover of "secular, liberal, and civic" trends to penetrate Iraqi politics and regain power. Hakim stated that because the Iraqi people remain fearful of the Ba'ath Party, he hoped the Ambassador's "blessings" of new secular political alliances would not be perceived by Iraqis as encouragement for a Ba'athist resurgence. Hakim explained that in Iraqis' minds, "secular liberal" parties are often conflated with the former regime. The Ambassador replied that the United States has been careful not to endorse any party or alliance for the election.

¶3. (C) After the meeting, Haitham al-Husseini, Hakim's assistant, confirmed that Hakim was referring to the newly formed electoral alliance headed by former PM Ayad Allawi and Sunni hardliner MP Salih Mutlaq (ref). Hussein later clarified to Poloff that Hakim raised this topic because of a media story that erroneously quoted the Ambassador as "blessing" Iraq's new secular parties. Hussein said Hakim wanted to make sure Iraqis did not see this quote as an endorsement of a particular alliance. Poloff reiterated that the USG supported the emergence of cross-sectarian, national alliances, but did not support a particular alliance.

Praise for Business and Investment Conference

¶4. (C) Hakim praised the October 20-21 Iraq Business and Investment conference held in Washington as a symbol of the new U.S.-Iraq relationship, but asked whether the focus on Afghanistan would cause the United States to lose interest in Iraq. The Ambassador responded that the U.S. desire for a strategic relationship with a strong Iraq remains unchanged and that the United States understands Iraq's long-term importance. Hakim stressed the need for "practical" application of U.S.-Iraq economic ties, saying only when there are "hundreds of projects and thousands of (American) investors, will we see the fruits of our labor" over these past years.

¶5. (C) Hakim continued that integration into the international economy is firmly in Iraq's interests. The

Ambassador predicted that after a successful national election, Iraq could see a great deal of foreign investment, especially from energy and infrastructure companies. Hakim informed the Ambassador of his interest in taking a tour of countries in the region in the near future, potentially before the January election. The Ambassador welcomed this plan as a way to change erroneous perceptions about Iraq in the region. Responding to a verbal invitation to visit the United States, Hakim said he also hopes to visit senior U.S. officials at some time in the future.

HILL